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Maori Family Culture: A Context of Youth Development in Counties/Manukau

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Abstract

This paper reports on a study designed to bring the voices of young people directly into the social science literature on environmental influences on wellbeing. We analyse accounts from young Maori about their families and the roles they play in their lives in order to focus on strengths and positive resources for the promotion of youth wellbeing.

Interview data were gathered from 12 females and 15 males, aged between 12 and 25 years, resident in the Counties/Manukau region. Participants who were managing satisfactorily in their lives were purposively selected for diversity of background and circumstances. Our “lifestory” approach sought narrative accounts of both everyday experience and the highs and lows of life; data were transcribed verbatim and analysed using discursive methods.

Clusters of themes relating to family environments including relationships with parents, siblings and extended kin groups emerged. Participants provided detailed and nuanced accounts of family cultures, reporting on conflict, caring, gender issues, sensitivity, discipline, levels of guidance and forms of support.

Key words Maori; whanau; family; culture; youth; development; wellbeing

INTRODUCTION

The relationships that constitute families are widely understood to be a vital part of the context in which the wellbeing of young people can be understood and enhanced. Along with other social environments such as peer groups, school settings and community and workplace contexts, family environments exert enormous influences on all aspects of the development and overall health and wellbeing of young people (Blum, 1998, Bond et al., 2001, Howard and Johnson, 1999, Kalil, 2003, Marjoribanks, 2004, McLaughlin, 2005, Sanders and Munford, 2005, Umana-Taylor et al., 2006, Zwieg et al., 2002, Roth and Brooks-Gunn, 1998, Pittman et al., 2001, Resnick, 2000, Silva and Stanton, 1996, Nataraja et al., 1992, Pryor and Woodward, 1996, Fergusson and Horwood, 2001, Fergusson and Horwood, 2003, Fergusson et al., 2005). However in Aotearoa New Zealand as elsewhere there are scant data and research-based knowledge that provides detailed accounts of the experience of family life from the perspectives of young people. Even less common are such data for Maori youth and in this paper we report on a qualitative research project designed to bring the voices of young urban Maori directly into the social science literatures around youth wellbeing. We examine existing scholarship as a backdrop to presenting accounts of family life gathered from 27 participants aged between 12 and 25 who lived in the Counties/Manukau region. Our discussion relates these data to emerging frameworks for youth development and health promotion with a view to examining what youth view as their needs for themselves and their health within the family context.

BACKGROUND

Most young people travel the journey between childhood and adulthood with energy, skill and considerable grace, with occasional stumbles that confronting converts to character and experience (Pittman et al., 2001, Roth and Brooks-Gunn, 1998, Adolescent Health Research Group, 2003). A small group do struggle with intermittent or ongoing crises, and a minority of these experience debilitating and disastrous problems usually with strongly environmental origins (Blum, 1998, Resnick, 2000).

In Aotearoa New Zealand two longitudinal research projects involving large birth cohorts provide some of the strongest data on the development and wellbeing of young people. The Dunedin Multidisciplinary Study provides an important window on the

development of young people and shows that the family has a central role in influencing the life experiences and choices available to the young participants (Silva and Stanton, 1996). Multiple measures were made on a variety of parenting and family domains to study their impact on the wellbeing of the child cohort at various age levels producing correlations between negative family environment ratings and problems in the children. For example at age 15 a focussed study (Nada-Raja et al., 1992) linked level of attachment to parents with measures of youth wellbeing. In general it is reported that the impacts of weak or negative family environments may be expressed as a wide range of distress, disorder and disadvantage with long-lasting effects on the lives of young people (Pryor and Woodward, 1996).

The Christchurch Longitudinal study (Fergusson and Horwood, 2001) has reported repeated measures of correlation between family style and stressors and incidence of mental illness and other forms of social difficulty. Most of the findings from this longitudinal study relate specifically to mental illness in the cohort and correlate such outcomes to parental separation and divorce, childhood sexual and physical abuse at moderate levels, and to other aspects of family functioning such as inter-parental violence, parental alcohol problems, and recombined families (Fergusson and Horwood, 2003, Fergusson et al., 2005). Examination of the backgrounds of children who by the age of fifteen years showed major mental illness problems found “childhoods marked by multiple social and family disadvantages that spanned economic disadvantage, family dysfunction, impaired parenting and limited life opportunities” (Fergusson and Horwood, 2001:292). Comparison of the most disadvantaged 5% of the sample with the most advantaged 50% showed risks of developing mental health problems elevated 100 fold.

Most of these studies have been built around standardised measures and quantitative analyses and neither of the longitudinal research projects gives salience to ethnicity as a significant variable in life experience. A further recent research project the Adolescent Health Survey (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2003) also sheds light on the role of the family in the lives of young people. This research which surveys a representative sample of 10,000 secondary school pupils finds that very high levels (approximately 85%) are thriving and closely and positively engaged with their families. In the Maori specific findings of the study (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2004) whanau is shown to be

a vital environment for taitamariki, emerging as a strong positive influence with most of the 2300 participants. More than 70% of participants said that they received praise for achievement, and wished that they could spend more time with parents and extended family, but noted that aspirations and expectations of whanau for them were not high. The report shows that over 90% were living in uncrowded houses, with a telephone and a car, and had at least one working parent, although there is a warning also that some Maori children are growing up in less than optimal family settings.

Although the research cited has produced valuable generalisations about youth experience of their family environments, it cannot present the complex (often contradictory) and nuanced accounts that young people offer in telling their own stories. As such they present only part of what is needed for the construction of sound policy and practice in the area of youth development because they do not actually give space to the richness of diverse young voices (Fine, 1992, Smith et al., 2002). A locally based approach that has greatly enhanced understandings of the complexities of young people's lives has been advanced by Sanders and Munford (2005). They used broad ecological frameworks to shape their research, using combinations of life story interviews, locational mapping and feedback systems to describe the multilevel influences on the wellbeing of young people in families.

The current study took a qualitative approach to understanding the wellbeing of young people. Working in three equally resourced ethnically based research teams (Maori, Samoan, Pakeha) we arranged to interview volunteers within each ethnic group who were for the most part in the system – living at home, attending school or working, not specifically engaged with social services or in trouble with the law – about their everyday lives and histories. Within each research module, analyses of these data revealed multiple salient themes in the experiences of young people and in this paper we report on those which relate to their family.

In this instance we will report on the data from Maori participants. The Pakeha and Samoan data are reported in separate papers (Fa'alau and Jensen, 2006, McCreanor et al., 2006). The purpose of the research was to assess experience within each cultural milieu and although there are interesting insights to be derived from the juxtaposition of these accounts, our wish is to respect the integrity of each rather than pre-ordain specious 'compare and contrast' exercises. We hope that this and its companion papers will

achieve two things; the writing of young people's experiences and voices into the research record, and a consideration of the implication of these understandings for policy and applications relating to the wellbeing of young people in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

In this country colonial processes have imposed a range of injustices on tangata whenua (Belich, 1986, Smith, 1999, Walker, 1990). Ongoing processes have over a century and a half, undermined Maori self-determination and development, marginalizing them as a disadvantaged and oppressed minority in their own land, visited by diverse harms in the political, economics, health, education, and social spheres (Ajwani et al., 2003, Spoonley et al., 2004, Statistics New Zealand, 2004). Periodically (and latterly intensely) these understandings have fuelled much research aimed at describing the status of Maori, explaining the aetiology of their condition and ostensibly informing policy and other interventions designed to improve Maori wellbeing.

Whanau Maori

Historically the primary social unit of Maori society was the whanau (Ngata, 1940), which consisted of immediate and extended family. The whanau unit would have several generations of members whose roles and responsibilities reflected their birth position within the whanau or the status and place achieved within the whanau unit (Metge, 1964, Walker, 1990). In the traditional whanau unit it was the grandparents that had the greatest responsibility and influence for guiding the rest of the whānau (Makereti, 1938). These elders, commonly called tupuna, kaumatua, koroheke, ruruhi and kuia were responsible for the learning and development of the young and youth until adulthood. The world views of this time reinforced the life experiences, patience and wisdom of elders as educators, mentors and role models for healthy youth development. This worldview is fully appreciated, for example, by closer examination of the Maori word 'mokopuna.'

Moko refers to image often facial (but including other body sites) and could also be a person's mark or signature. Puna refers to a spring or pond. When you combine the words you have an image reflected in a pool. This is true of a grandparent's relationship to a grandchild, it is the grandchild that is the image of the grandparent. When the grandparent looks at the grandchild they see their reflection, they see their mokopuna.

Maori had a developed system of relationship building between two prospective partners and principles dealing with sex, children, dissolution of relationships and adultery (Biggs, 1960, Buck, 1958, Makereti, 1938). The matua (parents) were responsible for developing the physical and economic well being of the whanau. Although, they still had a parenting role this was primarily the responsibility of grandparents (Bray and Hill, 1973, Buck, 1958, Pere, 1982). Young people in these times grew up amongst four generations, learning by exposure and instruction the values and practices needed to be fully incorporated into the whanau. Amongst siblings there were reciprocal relationships intended to support the welfare of the group as a collective, where the elder were referred to as tuakana and had responsibilities for leadership, protection and advice while the younger were referred to as teina and were required to serve and provide.

Social structures changed drastically with the impact of colonisation reconstituting whanau. The cumulative effects of colonial events such as warfare, legislative repression, land loss, intermarriage, and the undermining of Te Reo Maori, health, education practices, economic systems and other important social institutions, have meant that the established social orders have been displaced in favour of urban systems that are more like nuclear families. One impact of these changes is that young Maori and their families are more likely than their Pakeha peers to be living under constrained socio-economic conditions (McIntosh, 2005, Ministry of Social Development, 2004, 2005) has argued that these circumstances of scarcity and exclusion have had debilitating impacts on Maori social structure in general and Maori identity development in particular.

Grandparents are less likely to have a central role in the raising of children and parents are required to provide for the economic needs and care for the family. The support structures no longer exist to the same extent and the whanau unit does not live together or co-operate to maintain and develop along prescribed ways for collective benefit. Where whanau formerly worked communally in economic activities, as well as in the social, educational, protective and political arenas (Firth, 1959, Walker, 1990), in many cases there is little cooperation even within nuclear families as income is individually earned or in many cases drawn from social welfare of the state (Bray and Hill, 1973).

Moeke-Pickering (1996) writes that the concept of whanau has undergone dynamic changes in meaning and structure in recent times. Mason Durie (1997) notes that single

parent families are a growing phenomena in New Zealand and that this phenomenon is most frequent among Maori communities. Puketapu (1994) and Arohia Durie (1997) elaborate on this point by detailing that, with pan-tribalism, the notion of iwi is undergoing major change and it is perhaps at the whanau level that notions of well being are being played out. Mason Durie reports that whanau is a contested notion with some thinking that whanau is a relic from the past and some thinking it has simply changed with the times. These issues are part of trends in social organization that are well-documented in our society at large (Dharmalingam et al., 2004, Ministry of Social Development, 2004).

Mason Durie's (1997) model of key whanau responsibilities highlights the need for whanau members to take active roles in care, support and nurturing. He writes that family roles become redundant with the changes to whanau. Increasing isolation of generations has decreased the role of elders as they become culturally redundant. The report *Nga Abuatanga Nobo o te Hunga Pakeke Maori* (Cunningham et al., 2002) stated that issues of whanau relationships and whanau development in relation to aged persons are an area needing more study. This study also found that elders who are more disconnected from whanau relationships were more financially wealthy but had little contact with whanau. These understandings have impacted in the political and public consciousness with various commentators presenting their opinions. John Tamihere in his 2003 speech on the *Myth of Whanau* (Tamihere, 2003), wrote that many families lack nurturing, teaching, guiding and care; roles that were traditionally provided by grandparents and elders. More recently the briefing to the incoming Families Commission (Ministry of Social Development, 2004) summarised the state of whanau Maori in this way:

Whanau is a much wider concept than the traditional "family". It approximates what non-Maori would generally understand to be an extended family. Although there are many Maori one parent households, Maori are also more likely to live in multi-generational households. For Maori, whanau provides care and nurturing as well as identity and a sense of belonging and purpose. (p105)

To realise and aid Maori realities a number of frameworks for Maori wellbeing that include whanau as key domains have been developed and continue to be applied in the

New Zealand context; models such as Whare Tapa Wha (Durie, 1994), Te Pae Mahutonga (Durie, 2003), Te Wheke (Pere, 1991) and Nga Pou Mana (Royal Commission on Social Policy, 1988). Durie's (2003) Paiheretia framework for working with Maori in distress, takes off from these earlier foundations and is built into Whanau Advancement, a comprehensive package built on healing, capability building and development (Durie, 2004).

However there is little in the research record as to the ways in which young Maori experience and relate to whanau and the ways in which this might impact on their wellbeing and health. Smith et al. (2002) argue on the basis of narrative data collected from young people that Maori and Pakeha describe growing up in rural settings quite differently and that they feel a considerable estrangement from urban youth. Our project also gathered narrative data from young people but in this instance, living in urban south Auckland. In this paper we report on participants views of their family situations in an effort to include their knowledge and aspirations into debates within social policy development.

METHODS

Lifestory interviews were used to gather data from 27 young Maori (15 male, 12 female) aged 12-25 years. The majority were resident in Mangere, Papakura, Otara, Manurewa, Papatoetoe and Otahuhu and some had lived in these neighbourhoods all their lives. We were concerned with building a data-base that would strongly reflect both common experience and the particular events and circumstances of individual lives. Our participants were contacted by snowballing from multiple start-points drawn mainly from schools or personal networks in Counties/Manukau and could fairly be determined as managing well in their lives (as outlined on p4 above). Our sample is therefore purpose with participants selected for diversity of experience within the broader demographic that we were seeking to work with. While this does not produce findings which are generalisable in the usual sense, within a qualitative research framework it is appropriate for exploring and scoping the research question.

Ethical approval was sought and granted before individual interviews were conducted in the participant's choice of location by Maori researchers, gender matched to the participant. We encouraged participants to provide us with a narrative about their

lives woven around a loose chronological timeframe that we worked steadily through. Beginning with 'earliest memories' and progressing through stages characterised by (but not focussed on) education levels (preschool, primary, secondary, tertiary/employment), we supported each participant to talk out each phase and welcoming digressions and re-visitings.

At the time of the interview, ten participants were still attending school, being at different stages of intermediate and secondary school while three participants were attending a tertiary institution. Nine participants reported that they were in full time employment and two participants reported being unemployed. Three females reported being at-home mothers. No specific data were collected on the socio-economic status of the participant's families but from the field notes of the interviewers and from the narratives recorded in the transcripts it is clear that the majority lived with a scarcity of income and resources which had definite impacts on their life experiences.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and entered into the database system QSR N4, which facilitated the coding, storage and retrieval of the data. Data coded to a series of nodes developed by intensive reading of the transcripts provided the basis for a descriptive analysis of common themes that recurred in the participants' stories. In this paper we present data and analyses of the theme relating to experience of families and discuss the significance of the data and implications for understanding the wellbeing and development of young people.

FINDINGS

Our findings are presented as descriptive themes illustrated with excerpts from the participants. An overview of the entire project and with a summary of all themes is available as Edwards et al. (2003). For this paper we are interested specifically in our young participants' views on their families and we present thematic material under three main headings: parents, siblings (tuakana/teina) and extended family.

Relationships with Parents

Perhaps unsurprisingly there was a wide range of overall experiences with parents. In particular, our participants spoke of a lack of boundaries and guidance that they

interpreted as a lack of care or love. At the other extreme young people described control and domination by caregivers.

Interviewer: 'You know how you talk about your parents being strict, can you give us some examples of how you thought they were strict?'

'Well yeah, well one example was my dad always told me I had to come home and clean the dog, and clean our dog's kennel and I always thought 'what?' well I had one chance to be a um pedestrian one of those road pedestrians, but my father said 'nah' he, he, I took the letter home and he goes ummmmm, signed it, 'I do not accept my child being...' and so I was thinking to myself 'oh how come I'm not allowed to do this?' and then oh the next day I find myself back at home cleaning the, cleaning our dog's dog kennel and I thought 'oh yip well here's my life now''
(Mark)

Variations in family structure may have contributed to the diversity of experience; nearly two thirds of our participants had grown up in sole parent households mostly with their mothers. However a third of the young people had also experienced life in amalgamated families as separated parents formed relationships with new partners who often had children of their own.

A number of the young people expressed ongoing anger and resentment towards one or both parents as a result of these family break ups and recombinations.

'We were all brought up by my dad cause my mum she dropped us off and she never picked us up (laughs). You know, like oooops, I forgot (sarcastic tone employed and then laughs).
(Paula)

Although none were in the situation at the time of interview, many participants had lived with their grandparents at some time, reflecting a trend of broken parental relationships and the inability of stressed parents to provide adequate care.

Several participants from two parent families had friends with one parent and commented that they were grateful they had two parents. Seeing their parents operate a family and their relationship to both mother and father was able to provide them with

knowledge of behaviour and helped them decide what they did and didn't want in a relationship. A key to healthy family relationships identified by the participants was having parents attend and support youth at events, such as sports, cultural events and social events.

I remember in Primary School when my parents came to parent/teacher interviews. I was really excited that they came. It's about that support, it's the only one I can remember.' (Hera).

Participants were clear that having two parents meant that you could get support more easily when needed.

Mothers

In general terms participants had strong, nurturing, supportive relationships with their mothers. They highlighted the role of the mother as 'home-maker' in their family providing the continuity of care as well as the comforts and treats.

Everytime my mum made something it was a good chance to grab the bowl and go for a run and you know lick the bowl....and as you grow up and get older you sort of think, yeah that's how mum made it.' (Tony).

The mother was a central figure who for most played a nurturing and supportive role but also acted as a buffer or intermediary with more distant fathers.

I- I didn't really used to talk like on a personal level to my father I always used to talk to my mother I always used to go to her 'oh mum how come I'm not allowed this?' and 'mum how come dad said I'm not allowed to...' but um yeah I just... well I just forgot about it and let it go let it pass over my head... or whatever so I'd always go and relay my messages through mum (amused laugh) (Mark)

The female participants, although still very close to their mothers did not comment as positively of their mothers as the males did. They were nevertheless closer to their mothers than their fathers. Participants were well aware of the costs that childbearing

and rearing placed upon mothers as they sacrificed jobs and careers to centre on the home.

'Oh nah she's not working she's just um, 'cause we just, she USED to work but then um she, she was pregnant with my little sister Jemma so she had to stop working.' (Toni).

All participants had a female parent in their lives who provided some level of support. Many reported that they felt very good about themselves and others when the relationship was strong and that they felt less than satisfied when they were having problems with their mother.

'So Mum and I have a really close bond, really good friends.' (Melissa).

The views of the participants were that the mothers provided the warm home environment. This was different to the effect of fathers where the participants said they could handle strained relationships with fathers but that with mothers it caused anxiety. The relationships that were strong between mothers and daughters from early on were enduring. Relationships between mothers and sons were in general reported to reflect the unequivocal support that mothers provided.

Fathers

In contrast not all participants had male parents in their lives and about a third had nothing to do with their father. The male participants in particular talked of their fathers being staunch or "hard on them."

'I... I felt like my father was... he put up this sort of like strong image you know you always have to be a man and stuff like that you know? So I felt like... you know oh I wouldn't talk to him because he wouldn't really care.' (Mark).

Others argued that even when their father was around he was practically or emotionally unavailable.

I never really got on well with him, my dad, cause you know he was hardly ever home and when he was at home he didn't want to be disturbed, you know, sit down, eat dinner and watch T.V. By the time he sits down to watch T.V it's time for us to go to bed.' (Paul)

Many of the males discussed leaving home or getting angry as a result of disagreements with their fathers. This was seen as due to the fathers making many of the decisions and deciding on courses of action for the family that seemed to have negative effects. For example, the youth spoke of moving homes and shifting to new neighbourhoods and the unsettling effect this had. Many of the males saw the father as being responsible for the changes and the mother going along with it. Some took the view that parents were over controlling their lives and actively trying to stop them from "having a life" and this affected the relationships between males and their parents.

The male participants felt that what made for positive relationships with their fathers was time spent doing things together, time with fathers was also special because it was rare. This contrasted with relationships with mothers that relied more on a nurturing, consistent role.

My dad took me to Rainbows End and I was happy because me and my dad don't spend much time together.' (Anaru).

Some expressed regret that relationships with their father could not have been more meaningful.

You know, it would have been choice, you know, if I had seen him more and gotten close to him at a young age cause you know I think there's nothing cooler than you know your son hopping up on your lap, giving you a kiss on your cheek and saying, 'night dad,' and running off.' (Paul).

Fathers were primarily responsible for income and participants' experiences of their dads were mediated by this reality, which highlighted the perceived gender roles of the participants' parents.

'On my sixth birthday, my dad got his first ever ... contract grant and it was the day of my birthday that it started and he had to leave my birthday early, yeah I remember that he only stayed for like the first hour and then the clown came and then he left and so I can remember the truck parked outside and I'm waving to him bye dad see ya later.' (Mere).

Generally, relationships with parent or parents in Maori families were positive but the degree of holistic health was affected in either positive or negative ways by the relative quality of relationships with parents and other adults in the home, the number of siblings and the economic pressures faced by families.

Many of the young people also felt disadvantaged compared to friends of theirs who were allowed greater freedoms or opportunities that they could not access and this was a source of much friction with parents. Many of the youth participants felt that a major cause of friction with parents was due to parents hardly ever being at home and, if they were, it was usually in the evenings when parents were tired and didn't want to be bothered.

Siblings – tuakana/teina

A key dimension in whanau dynamics is the concept of tuakana/teina, the reciprocal responsibilities that pertain between older and younger siblings including sisters, brother and same generation cousins. Tuakana siblings carry the obligations of leadership, inheritance and responsibility while teina are required to support, serve and respect. These positions are dynamic and fluid from context to context reflecting the abilities and interests of the individuals.

'Yeah um, well there was about four of us at the time I was um... I'm sort of like the third child and I was in the middle. I had a um an older brother and an older sister and um yeah my parents you know they were- they had- were keen into their social activities and stuff like that so ah yeah, we always used to... my older brother and sister used to look after us on the weekends and stuff' (Mark).

Many participants recalled being the tuakana with the responsibilities to care for younger siblings – to cook, to walk to school, to collect, to be responsible – as well as to perform certain tasks to support the whanau such as doing the dishes, mowing the lawns

and the like. Older siblings saw the younger ones as annoying and females talked of males being more annoying than younger sisters. In contrast, participants who were not in senior roles explained that they didn't enjoy being bossed around by older siblings. An issue highlighted by many of the participants was that they did not feel a close bond in most cases to step siblings from reconstituted families.

I've got two half brothers, they're from my mum's first relationship and I'm close to them but it doesn't feel like a brother, we don't have that real connection.' (Mere).

Older siblings said they preferred to hang out with their teina at home rather than in public where they preferred to be with their own age. Having said this, tuakana participants said that they enjoyed the opportunity to be trusted and to be responsible for their family members. They felt that having these roles was a step towards adulthood and independence and that it prepared them for later roles.

Extended Family

All the participants had relationships with at least one other member of their extended family. In many cases many of the participants lived with grandparents, although many grandparents had already passed away. Another significant family member was an aunty and for a number of participants the aunty was a surrogate parent who provided a sanctuary (sometimes long term) at times of conflict with their parents. Extended family also provided nurturing as they often asked about the participants, took an interest in them and provided support for their ideas.

Grandparents

None of the participants had grandparents living with them but many reported having lived with their grandparents at one time or another.

My mother, um... she took care of me and then my mother and father broke up when they were...when they were quite young because my mother had me when she was quite young and she kind of broke up and went their own ways and then my grandmother I think took over, she just took me so that they didn't go passing me around over there, yeah that was the main thing why I stayed with her, ... I would have been about five years old, I can just remember going over to my nan's house one week and then staying with my mother for one week and just yeah just changing

like that every week it was good 'cause they both lived in Mangare both you know I can just remember the things like that staying there on weekends seeing my cousies on one side and then going and then seeing my other side. Mum lives in Australia now and I've just been there a couple of weeks ago, yeah, haven't seen my dad for a while, that's kind of stink but I still see my dad's mother I still see my nan every so often but my dad is kind of scarce lately.' (Peter, 18).

Only a few of the participants said that they had regular contact with their grandparents and remembered more frequent contact while children, mainly in school holidays, and that the contact had lessened, as the participants got older. Most contact with grandparents was on occasions of celebration or grief such as birthdays and funerals. A frequently recurring theme was attending church with grandparents when young.

'My grandparents, they sort of wanted us to take up a religious side but I think as we got older they eased down a little, you know.....it was our grandparents that wanted us to be religious.' (Hone).

Both male and female participants felt close to their grandparents, particularly to their grandfathers; but again some found them tough.

'I don't know why he doesn't show emotion, guess he's staunch.' (Rawiri).

Aunts/Uncles

For many of the participants, aunts and uncles were key figures in their lives. Participants felt that they could talk to their aunts and uncles and that they understood, this did not happen with their parents. Participants also recalled spending time with uncles and aunts through having time with cousins. Those that did not live in close proximity most commonly saw aunts and uncles in holiday periods. The participants felt time with these relatives was enjoyable.

'I used to love going and seeing my family, that's a big thing, like my aunties and uncles, they live out west so it was a big deal every time I saw them.' (Toni).

For the majority of participants lack of resources caused by low economic status meant that the opportunities to visit family in the same city let alone outside Auckland were rare. Many families did not have vehicles and had to rely on others. The participants reported that interaction with extended family including aunts and uncles decreased as grandparents died. It was at a grandparent's house that the family would most usually congregate and interact.

Cousins

A happy memory for all the participants was spending time with cousins most commonly in the form of childhood relationships that became fragmented and less frequent over time. Interchanges with cousins were a regular occurrence in holiday periods. Some of the participants said that many of their earliest memories were of activities with cousins, often as a mix of fun and mischief. Many said that they felt pressure to act like their cousins when around them, which sometimes led to trouble. More frequently participants spoke of sporting, festive and adventurous activities within such groups. Generally these relationships were like an intermediary to peer group relations, closer than strangers but more removed than siblings. As a result many of the reported activities and memories reflect those reported as a feature of peer relations elsewhere (Edwards et al., 2003).

DISCUSSION

The standard approaches to the reporting of research and information about Maori are comparative and deficit-based and in this regard much recent treatment of whanau fits the mould neatly. In choosing to report our findings from Maori separately we have attempted to resist this trend and allow the research to speak its own truth. The approach taken in this project coheres strongly with the youth-focussed research of Sanders and Munford (2005) and with that of Smith et al. (2002). The findings link tightly with the insights from the Maori study within the Youth 2000 Survey (Adolescent Health Research Group et al., 2004) to flesh out in experiential terms the findings about whanau relationships. In particular our analyses bring the voices of young Maori directly into the research record to speak of their aspirations, anxieties and issues in that vital context of positive youth development, the family unit. The young people acknowledge the love and support they receive but do not flinch at criticising parents and the wider networks for not having high expectations of themselves or their children. They explain perceived

shortcomings in their parents' behaviour in environmental terms, particularly speaking of financial stress, but also expressing their experience of emotional remoteness in their fathers. The tuakana/teina relationship among siblings was a key part of a common pattern of intense, co-operative and sometimes competitive interactions around serving and providing in a wide range of family activities. Extended kin networks were also very important providing linkages with their related age cohorts, a wider range of social exposures and crucial 'safety nets' at time when the core of the family was too stressed.

These themes from our data reflect Maori families as nurturing but fragile features of the lives of the youth participants. The strong relationships with mothers and inconsistent bonds to fathers reflect the stresses and impacts of living in conditions of scarcity and marginalisation arising from the ongoing effects of colonisation on Maori whānau. The need for fathers in particular to work long hours at perhaps unsatisfying jobs to try to make ends meet, can place stresses on relationships within families that are reflected in divergent, gendered patterns of parent child bonds. The powerful interactions with siblings echo traditional tuakana/teina relationships but also highlight the contemporary disruptions of social order that undermine such role definitions, arising from contemporary phenomena such as single parent and reconstituted families. Such changes to whanau structure may be having flow-on effects that impact negatively on the relationships among siblings within families. Extended family relationships continue to be of considerable cultural and social importance, providing independent advice and support, kinship peer-groups of cousins, and at need, refuge when tensions in the home become too great.

The evidence from young Maori, provided both by this project and by the Youth 2000 Survey (Adolescent Health Research Group et al., 2004), that taitamariki value and express the wish to spend more time within the whanau environment is important. It counters a general belief that Maori families are dysfunctional and that their failure to provide for their young people drives them to lives of failure and crime. If young people, the most vulnerable members of families, are determinedly articulate about the value to them of their whanau, then this is an important signal to society and to policy-makers that whanau as a social institution, is an important site for investment and development.

Although all participants described various dissatisfactions with their whanau, with paternal absence (physical and/or emotional) being a particular feature, they did not reflect the dysfunctional and uncaring Maori whanau frequently drawn on in the media. Despite some participants describing two-parent families as more able to provide support when needed, common features of whanau included support and nurture from several generations and from cousins; contributions that are often invisible or undervalued. These findings reiterate the importance of understanding, valuing and advancing diverse definitions of whanau to include aunties and uncles, grandparents and cousins. This framing, which is in constant tension with bureaucratic tendencies to orient to nuclear families, reflects the historical evidence on Maori family structure (Makereti, 1938) and illustrates the durability and robustness of this feature of Maori social organization. Again it is a strength that could be worked with to further the positive development of young Maori and to enhance understandings of how these structures support and can be supported.

In this sense the research reinforces, from a different perspective, the recent focus of strengthening whanau as a platform for Maori development and advancement. In Durie's (2004) schema, which emerges out of his Te Pae Mahutonga framework for wellbeing, positive transformation for Maori is seen to turn upon the closely linked processes of whanau support, whanau healing (where necessary) and whanau development. The wellbeing of rangatahi Maori is crucially impacted on by the quality of whanau as a context for Maori youth development and is the future wellbeing of the Maori population. Whanau are key sites for the intergenerational transfer of knowledge, wealth and power in Maori society and all means to strengthen and build these structures will benefit Maori and the wider community.

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